

VETERANS & SENIORS COMMITTEE

of the

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

VERBATIM MINUTES

A regular meeting of the Veterans & Seniors Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York on February 28, 2011.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Leg. Steven H. Stern, Chairman
Leg. Vivian Vilorio-Fisher, Vice Chair
Leg. Edward P. Romaine
Leg. Lou D'Amaro

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Legislator Jay Schneiderman, Second Legislative District
George Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature
Sarah Simpson, Assistant Counsel
Renee Ortiz, Chief Deputy Clerk
Benny Pernice, Budget Review Office
Laura Halloran, Budget Review Office
Ed Hennessy, Aide to County Executive
Tom Ronayne, Director of Veterans Service Agency
Holly Rhodes-Teague, Director of Office for the Aging
Paul Perillie, Aide to Majority Leader
Deborah Harris, Aide to Leg. Stern
Charles Spencer, Dignity Memorial
Patty Walsh, Dignity Memorial
Ken Bombace, President of Suffolk Police Veterans Association
Larry Godoy, SPVA, 2nd Vice President
Charles Ross, SPVA, Financial Secretary
Delilah Bustamante, SPVA, Recording Secretary
Phil Stefanelli, SPVA, First Sargent At Arms
Jack Caffey, Aide to Presiding Officer
Kara Hahn, Communications Director, Presiding Officer
Eric Kopp, County Executive's Office
Ali Nazir, Aide to Leg. Kennedy
And all other interested parties

VERBATIM MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer

VERBATIM MINUTES TRANSCRIBED BY:

Denise Weaver, Legislative Aide

THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 11:43 AM

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Good morning everyone. Welcome to the Committee on Vets and Seniors. Thank you for being with us today. I ask everybody to please rise and join in the Pledge of Allegiance led by Legislator D'Amaro.

SALUTATION

I ask everybody to please remain standing and join us in a moment of silence as we keep all of our brave men and women fighting for our freedom overseas in our thoughts and prayers.

MOMENT OF SILENCE OBSERVED

Thank you. Okay. Welcome everybody and, again, thank you for being with us. You know, let's flip it around, just a bit, I'm going to ask Holly to join us first.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Good morning.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Good morning.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

I just want to ask for your support of the resolution that's in front of you today for a sole source bidder. It's American Red Cross. They're providing the services to us to provide meals in the Brookhaven area since 1985 and they do a great job. They do the central kitchen for seven sites in Brookhaven and they're cost effective and we're very happy with their service. So, thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Anybody have questions for me?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Just what have you been hearing out there regarding the Meals on Wheels Program and, you know, issues with our federal government and funding? Is that something that we are starting to prepare for, what do you know?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

On the State level the mid-year cuts we received last year are proposed again for this year. So instead of being mid-year cuts, there'll be a cut for the whole year. We were able to sustain those cuts last year. I think we'll be all right. In the scheme of the entire State budget, we are not in bad shape.

The federal government, I have not seen what they're doing yet in terms of cuts. I know AOA's supposedly proposed to receive some. Where the biggest challenge, I think, on the federal level is what's happening to the community volunteer programs: Foster Grandparents, Retired Senior Volunteer Programs, the Senior Companion Programs, they -- under the House -- the House proposal, they are slated to be abolished. So that is a huge challenge because they provide countless hours of volunteer services in the Foster Grandparents.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Like RSVP?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

And RSVP. So depending on what happens after that, I'm not sure what's going to happen next. That's the biggest challenge on the federal level at this point for senior programs.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Viloría-Fisher.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Holly, I had a call the other day that perplexed me and I'm not certain if my aide got the full answer. Someone called my office and said that we have a program in Suffolk County where we provide people with vouchers when they go to restaurants; senior citizens? We subsidize some of their costs when they go to restaurants.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

We have in our Nutrition Program one program and it's at Ben's, which I think is now known as Zan's.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Zan's, right. This person was talking about Zan's.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Zan's. And that program is a -- it's a restaurant program we started about 13 years ago where a senior could go there. We provide a subsidy to Zan's under the Nutrition Program. And the senior has a contribution that they make and they receive a restaurant meal. And it's usually -- they have a limited number that they do so I think they have -- I don't know if they have to make the reservations for it in order to do it, but that is the only restaurant program we have.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Is that cost effective? I mean, it seems that eating out is so much more expensive than eating in?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

It's actually -- in terms of the cost of our other nutrition programs it's pretty cost effective and the seniors like it. We were trying to attract a younger group of people and so it's a program that's like late afternoon that they do over at Zan's. And it's been running pretty successfully. But they have a limited amount of money for that program. So when they don't have, you know, when the money's out, they can't do it, you know, they don't receive any more subsidies from us on that.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

How are people eligible for that? How does it work?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Over age 60 they can go to it.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Wait a minute, so I could get something good at Zan's and get a voucher?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

It's not a voucher. I believe -- it's not a -- it's not a voucher. What they have to do is they have to call to make a reservation for it. It's been working. It's been working --

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

So it's not need-based or anything?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

None of our nutrition programs are need-based. It's over age 60. The congregant sites that's all you have to do is be over 60. You can walk in and say *I'd like a meal*.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

I guess what's concerning me is that I, you know, I know how -- what a tough time people like Meals On Wheels are having, which provide food for --

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Meals On Wheels is different than the congregant sites.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

The congregant everything's over age 60. Meals on Wheels we prioritize based on isolation, on frailty, things like that. But the congregant programs are meant to be socialized programs as well. People go in, they meet with their peers, they spend the afternoon there or the morning there at a senior citizen --

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Is that what like Adelante does?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Yeah.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

All those programs, all you have to do is be age 60 to go to that program. There are voluntary contributions that they're requested to make, if they can make them. If they don't choose to make them, we can't force them to make them. And that is under the Older Americans Act, that they have to be given the ability to make a contribution if they wish to, but they don't have to. And we cannot charge a fee for those programs.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Okay, thank you. This is why it's good to be in a Committee that you haven't been on for a number of years; you start to learn new things.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Okay. Any questions you could always find me.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator D'Amaro.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Okay, thank you and good morning. Before you go, Holly.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Thanks. I just wanted to go back to the resolution that's on for the contract award with the Red Cross, I believe, it is.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Yes.

LEG. D'AMARO:

There was only one respondent to the RFP; is that correct?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Correct.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Okay. And just, if you could fill me in a little bit, this is an ongoing program. Has the Red Cross administered this or been in contract with the County in the past? How long? You know, just some detail.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

This program provides meals to seven sites in Brookhaven Town. So we provide -- we pay for the meal to Red Cross. And then the sites also receive a subsidy from us to run the program -- the congregant or the home-delivered meal programs. So the seven sites of Brookhaven Town, they don't cook the meals themselves. Red Cross does that for them. And it's been going since 1985. The contract is just over \$700,000 for the course of a year and they provide approximately 170,000 meals.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Okay. So the facility itself is provided by the Red Cross; the kitchen, the central kitchen.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

The central kitchen is located at the Brookhaven National Lab. And they have -- Red Cross has developed that relationship with the Lab. So they do that and we, you know, we provide the, you know, the contract with them for the \$700,000 to do these meals.

LEG. D'AMARO:

All right. So we're paying for the meals to the Red Cross.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

To the Red Cross for the cooking and getting the meals packaged. And then the sites, and that's two town sites, two American Red Cross sites, we have a couple non-profits, American Center, Center Moriches and Faith Baptist and those sites receive the meals from Red Cross.

LEG. D'AMARO:

This program's been in effect since 1985.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

1985.

LEG. D'AMARO:

That's good. It's very successful then. How has your funding in this program trended over recent years?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

We receive funding from the Older Americans Act, federal money. Truthfully, the home-delivered meal programs have not kept up. The federal government has been woefully negligent in that case. The congregant meal program is pretty well maintained where it's supposed to be at 90/10, 90% federal, 10%. But the home-delivered meal programs across the board are not funded the way they're supposed to be. It's supposed to be 90/10 and they're probably closer to 70/30.

LEG. D'AMARO:

The \$700,000 total in the contract is just the County portion or is that the entire contract?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

That's the entire contract.

LEG. D'AMARO:

And the County's funding roughly 10% of that?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

No, I'd have to look that up because they do have home-delivered meals. It's probably higher; the County portion of that than the 10%.

LEG. D'AMARO:

All right.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Because home-delivered meals, we pick up more of the cost just because there hasn't been enough funding from the federal.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Yeah, that's fine. But we're not funding the entire thing.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

No, absolutely not.

LEG. D'AMARO:

All right. And there's sufficient funding in the Operating Budget for this year to cover the County's portion?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Correct.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Uh-huh. Okay, has the Red Cross been doing this since 1985?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Yes.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Very good. Okay, thank you.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Holly, I'm sorry. You know, it's just, I have to say you blew my mind a little bit with the over 60 because it's just seems --

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

It's very young.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Yes.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Yes, it is. It's very young.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Now is that according to federal --

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

When this program started in 1965, it was very old. It's changed.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

And are we restricted by federal regulations on that age?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Federal regulations require that programs under the Older American Act are over age 60.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

So we can't make the age higher and we can't do a need-based thing on this?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

No.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Why? Okay, very interesting. Thank you.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

If we want their money, you have to do what they ask.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Yeah, but they're down there supposedly looking at ways to trim the budget.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

It could happen at some point. There's been discussions on whether, you know, the programs -- I have to tell you, honestly, in our programs, the average age for a lot of our programs that we're serving when we look at it is 75-plus, even though it's 60. If you're 60 you're not coming to a nutrition site. And if you're 60 you're probably not getting a home delivered meal.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

But then you're going to Zan's and calling your Legislator and complaining because they didn't let you and your wife eat there for the reduced -- you know, that was the call that I got. And we were shocked that he was even getting a subsidy for himself and he wanted to get himself and his wife who's younger.

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Sorry.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Director Ronayne.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Good morning, Chairman, members of the Committee. As always, thank you again for the invitation to return.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

How are you doing?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I'm well, thank you. You?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Good.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I haven't got a great deal to report on today. A couple of things that I would like to make the Committee aware of, then, I would hope that word could be passed along to the remaining Legislators, one item that is a very severe concern to us right now is the proposed cuts by New York State that will affect the Long Island State Veterans Home in Stony Brook. That nursing home is revered. It is considered a crown jewel in state home operations.

The Governor has proposed that a fund and account that the nursing home maintains essentially be raided. And this year they'll take \$4.7 million. Next year it's going to be closer to 5 million for a total of almost \$10 million. The problem is the fund that the State is looking to take these monies away from are not funds that maintain state dollars. This is an account where payments of private insurance to the nursing home are deposited. This is the account where the federal VA stipend and per diem money is deposited. There is some Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement money in there, but it's primarily money that has nothing to do with the State; yet they're taking it.

The real problem is it's a 350-bed facility with slightly over 500 employees. And I spoke to the director, Director Fred Sganga, several times last week and over this past weekend. His evaluation of these cuts will result in the loss of about 100 beds, which will be 100 veterans being displaced from the facility and probably laying off in the neighborhood of 75 employees. So it's a real concern. This is a facility that serves our veterans exquisitely. They also have an adult daycare program that provide services to a great many veterans. That's up in the air as to what would happen to that program if it would continue to run at all.

So, you know, in the veterans community we are very concerned about this and we would ask the support of the members to make it known to the Governor's Office that this type of cut while -- when everybody is experiencing cuts and feeling some pain, this is one of those issues that really needs to be looked at with a broader view. This is a big picture issue versus *let's save a few dollars in the moment*.

And, again, if we could ask you to just get behind this and, you know, in any way that we are able to help the nursing home, I know that it would be appreciated.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Viloría-Fisher.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

As you know, Stony Brook's in my district. And I had a very serious meeting with Dr. (Inaudible) regarding the draconian cuts at the hospital. And so I put together a letter to be signed by all 17 Legislators to send to our Suffolk County delegation to represent us in Albany because of the bigger picture. The hospital is a de facto County hospital. We use many of their services. I know the veterans home --

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

The cuts to the hospital are extraordinary.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

It's unbelievable. And, Mr. Chair, I think I would like to put together a similar letter. I know the veterans home very well and I know the quality of care people -- and dignity that people have -- get there. I think we should do the same thing for the veterans home.

It's just at this point in time when we've deployed people over and over again where we have veterans making the ultimate sacrifice, veterans coming home with so many needs, you need the kind of place and the kind of -- I mean, and many of the people there, of course, are older veterans from other wars. But I think the symbolism, the respect for our veterans and the sense that we owe them a place to come to is really critical. So if we could get together and put together a letter

and I'll speak with Mr. Sganga as well.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I thank you very much for that. Interesting you would use the word "dignity".

We have invited today to join us representatives from a group known as Dignity Memorial. I won't report too much on them. I think that we'd be better served having them do that. But we had spoken about this group in the past. We recently had a ceremony, I think it was January 8th if I'm not mistaken, at Calverton National Cemetery, where representatives from Dignity Memorial working with officials in the City of New York were able to identify, take possession of, provide preparation of, provide the clothing for, provide free caskets and free hearse transportation for 20 veterans who had essentially been unclaimed. They were either homeless or indigent or for some other reason had gone unclaimed. Dignity took all 20 of these veterans and in one ceremony -- and as it turns out it is the largest service of its type ever in the history of the United States, and it happened right here in Suffolk County and it happened only because Dignity Memorial came forward with their Homeless Veteran Burial Program.

The nice thing about this is that whenever we have a unclaimed veteran, we know that he won't go to a DSS interment. We know that he will not go to a Potter's Field type situation. We identify him as a veteran. Dignity gets on the phone, they make the arrangements, they pay for everything and the veteran gets a final interment that is befitting his service.

We recently identified and buried our very first Suffolk County resident. And I'm very proud to have been able to work with Dignity. And, Chairman, if you have no objection I would like to introduce Mr. Charles Spencer and Miss Patty Walsh from Dignity Memorial and I think they have a brief presentation.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Yeah, let's have Charles and Patty come on up. And while they're coming on up, I know Legislator Romaine has a question for you.

LEG. ROMAINE:

I just have a quick question. Whatever I can do with the veterans nursing home, please, contact my office and I'd be happy to do that. But my question is, how many veterans do we have in the John J. Foley Nursing Home?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I don't have an exact number.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Could you get back to me with that number, please?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yes, Sir.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Thirty-eight.

LEG. ROMAINE:

You have 38. Thirty-eight veterans in the John J. Foley Nursing Home?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I'll reach out and confirm that number.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Okay. Just point of curiosity. Thank you.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Mr. Spencer and Miss Walsh.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Director Ronayne, good morning. I also wanted to ask you about the vets home at Stony Brook. You said it would -- the State cutback would result in losing about a hundred beds, I mean, beds that are presently filled.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Those beds are presently filled. The State Home at Stony Brook has an occupancy rate of -- in excess of 99%. There is literally not an empty bed in the house. Turnover is extremely fast. There is a waiting list. So, I mean, the effect of losing 100 beds, some of which may or may not have been occupied, is not the case; these are real people who will be displaced.

LEG. D'AMARO:

So forgive me for not knowing this, but that facility is dedicated solely for veterans; is that correct?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Veterans, their spouses and their surviving spouses.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Okay. Very good. And should they lose -- should the facility lose the funding, what -- where is the closest facility for veterans; similar facility, if there is one even close?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

There is one in St. Albans in Queens.

LEG. D'AMARO:

One in Queens.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

But they, again, operate at capacity. So it wouldn't be a matter of moving a vet. And, again, the geography of it is important to consider, too.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Because we're talking about older people. To take somebody out of Stony Brook does not necessarily mean that they would find their way into a bed in St. Albans. It's going to be a matter of finding private care.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right. And what you're -- I think what you were saying previously was that the State is taking, in effect, dedicated revenue streams from this facility. It's not -- I mean, you were describing the revenue that's being taken as something that it's -- I mean, no one ever wants cuts, but this is really inappropriate to take this revenue. Can you explain that to me again?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

The origins of the money in this account are not -- it's not State funding. This is money that when the nursing home bills private insurers for residents who have private insurance, those payments --

LEG. D'AMARO:

So it's revenue being generated by the nursing home itself?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Yeah, yeah.

LEG. D'AMARO:

It's not like they're taking funding that the State would give, let's say, from just the State coffers or State taxes. This is money being generated within the facility itself?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

That's correct.

LEG. D'AMARO:

So they're viewing the nursing home as a revenue stream in effect.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

In my opinion that's exactly what they're doing.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

I mean one of the larger components of the funding sources in this account are the Department of Veterans Affairs per diem stipends that are paid on behalf of the residents. That's federal money.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Now that's proposed -- how is that being proposed by the State? What, you know, what stage is that at?

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

From my discussions with Fred Sganga, the Director of the facility, it's very close.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

It's going to be a part of the -- it's going to be a part of the State Operating Budget. And he's essentially been told that, you know, *we're in hard times right now, this is what it's going to be.*

LEG. D'AMARO:

Okay, thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Charles Spencer.

MR. SPENCER:

Good morning, Mr. Chair and Committee members. I'm Charles Spencer and this is Patty Walsh and we're with Dignity Memorial. Dignity Memorial is a group of funeral homes in Long Island and New York State and we have associates around the country.

And in order to give back to the community for veterans, we started the Dignity Memorial Homeless Veterans Burial Program. And many people in the County are involved. And a lot of these programs start with Tom Ronayne at Veterans Service Office. He identifies veterans that need help. We deal with the public administrator who makes us eligible to handle the funeral of the homeless person. We deal with the Medical Examiner, with Tom Ronayne's office, with many other offices of veterans services.

And we make sure the person is indigent, homeless. And homeless doesn't mean you have no place to live, but you don't have a permanent residence. And once such person in Suffolk has been identified, and I believe in talking with different people -- every year there'll be about 35 to 37 homeless veterans who will pass away.

There are many programs for veterans while they're alive, but once they die they become the responsibility of the County where they die. So this program, as Tom Ronayne had mentioned, helps the County and relieves the Department of Social Service from paying for the funeral.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good. Patty, did you want to say anything?

MS. WALSH:

I just wanted to make you aware also that Tuesday was the first Suffolk County homeless veteran that was buried. That was Harry Grayson and he was buried from Lloyd Spencer in West Islip. And we had a very nice turnout. And Tom did a great job of gathering all the troops and all the veterans organizations to come out and support it. Thank you.

MR. SPENCER:

Long Island and Suffolk County have the largest veterans population of any county, which is a surprise to me as a veteran. And as a father-in-law of a Marine Corps Colonel, I would think it would be Virginia around the military bases, but it's right here.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Yes. Well, thank you. Thank you so much for being here and for participating in this important program, of course, for your service and that of your family as well.

MR. SPENCER:

Thank you very much. And we also have the Dignity Memorial Vietnam Wall, which is going to be up in the Veterans Administration Hospital in Northport this year in October.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

October.

MR. SPENCER:

Yes.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good.

MR. SPENCER:

So, thank you.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

One other thing. When a veteran is buried, they are always buried from -- under a flag-draped casket -- a flag-draped casket. Upon interment, that flag is removed and ceremonially folded. What we do as a part of this program is, you know, you would wonder what happens to that flag. Well, we know the identity of the veteran and we have certain basic information. Those flags are presented to different individuals based on the when, the where and the whys. The flags, when they are presented, are not intended to be kept or that the ownership of the flag goes to that person receiving the flag. There is a brass plate on the flag case that the flag goes into with the veteran's name on it. And if at any time in the future somebody, whether it be a family member or loved one, a friend, comes forward, the intent is that at the time that that person is identified, that flag will be turned over to that family member or the loved one or friend. All we are doing is acting as a custodian until such time.

And, you know, hopefully that'll happen more often than not. But I think that's -- you know, not even sentimentally, but I think on a human level, that's an important part to the program, that the veteran is not forgotten once he's buried; that that flag with his name on it continues to be cared for until such time.

MR. SPENCER:

Just to mention about the flag, it was presented to a Gold Star mother, Michelle McNaughton here in Suffolk County. And once the flag case is inscribed, the fellow sitting to my left is going -- we're going to present it to him. He doesn't know that until just now, but he will be the caretaker. And if the family ever shows up, Tom, you'll take care of that.

DIRECTOR RONAYNE:

Happily.

MR. SPENCER:

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good.

MR. SPENCER:

Thanks very much.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Thanks for being with us.

Okay. Ken?

MR. BOMBACE:

All right. Good morning.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And, Ken, welcome.

MR. BOMBACE:

Oh, were you going to say something?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

I just did.

MR. BOMBACE:

Good morning. My name is Ken Bombace. I'm the President of the Suffolk Police Veterans Association. I want to thank the Chairman, Legislator Stern, of the Veterans and Seniors Committee and the entire Committee for inviting us here today to speak. I know your time is limited so I'm going to get straight to the business at hand.

Myself and the executive board of the Suffolk Police Veterans Association have come today to do three things: First, we want to familiarize the Veterans and Seniors Committee with our organization and our mission. Secondly, we want to briefly describe our accomplishments since our inception in 2006. Finally, and most importantly, we come here today to ask for assistance to help our organization grow and become an even more effective veterans support organization.

It was in 2006 after returning from a deployment in Sumer Iraq that I first thought or contemplated the idea of creating a police veterans association. Seemed as though we have a fraternal organization for ever segment of the law enforcement community. As everyone probably knows, we

have the Emerald Society for Irish officers, the Steuben Society for German officers, Hispanic Society for Hispanic officers; yet there was no organization representing the over 600 veterans just serving in the Suffolk County Police Department. And that doesn't include all of the other law enforcement agencies that we represent throughout the County.

With that being said, it was in August of 2006 that I and several other officers came together and created the framework that is the Suffolk Police Veterans Association today. Since our inception we've grown into quite a bit more than just a fraternal organization. In fact, the SPVA is a state and federally recognized 501(c)(19) veterans organization.

Over the last five years we've built a strong reputation within the Suffolk law enforcement community and veterans communities. Today we serve not only as a fraternal group, but we work hard through various initiatives and fundraising events to support veterans throughout the entire year.

Each year we donate tens of thousands of dollars to local veterans to assist them during their times of need. A few examples of how we assist these veterans is as follows: We make donations for equipment, such as ramps or modifications to homes. We provide financial assistance, veterans in need with paying their rent, utilities, even school cost or day-care cost for veterans in need.

Deployment support. The Suffolk Police Veterans Association has created a deployment support program for law enforcement officers in Suffolk County. And basically what we do is every officer who deploys, we provide them with a \$250 gift card to buy items that might not be provided to them otherwise.

And wounded warriors, each year we take a trip down to Walter Reed Army Hospital with 30 to 50 of our members of our organization and we hold a barbecue at the hospital for over 500 wounded warriors.

The organization becomes involved in assisting veterans through one of several referral sources. We receive referrals from the following: Suffolk County Veterans Service Agency and Tom Ronayne who you just heard from, members and their families, veterans who heard of our organization through the VA, veterans groups or other members of our group. And finally elected officials including Suffolk County Legislators.

Our organization often serves as a bridge while a veteran may be working to secure employment, obtain veterans benefits and work his or her way out of a financial hardship. With our nation fighting a war on terrorism on multiple fronts, these issues are becoming more important. And the role of organizations like ours are also becoming more important.

An example of how we allocate funds from the Veteran Assistance Fund to help local veterans would be as follows: We receive a request from the Suffolk Veteran Service Agency, for example, which is oftentimes the case for assistance with a veteran who needs help with his rent. I receive all the related information concerning the veteran and the request. And then because all of our executive board members are active law enforcement officers with demanding schedules, I usually text that pertinent information to all of them and ask for a vote. Within minutes usually I have a final vote; usually it's approved. And in the same day we could have a check out to support a veteran. So as I said, it's kind of a bridge sometimes where the protocol that receive funds from other organizations might take a little bit longer.

In order to completely separate our activities as a fraternal group from our veterans assistance initiatives, we have created a Veterans Assistance Fund. One hundred percent of the monies allocated to this fund are used exclusively to assist veterans. In order to fund this account we hold several fundraising initiatives each year. This -- just recently, days ago, we had a Mardi Gras fundraiser that we do each year with 300 tickets sold for \$100 each. And we usually profit \$10,000 from that event. And a hundred percent of that money goes to the Veterans Assistance Fund, which

subsequently goes to support veterans in Suffolk County.

We have a golf outing as do many other organizations, but our proceeds from our golf outing go a hundred percent to the Veterans Assistance Fund.

And finally we have a "War at the Shore" adventure race we hold each year with 30 teams, two members. And each team has to raise money and do a bike portion, they have to do kayak and running. And each year we raise money for veterans through that event.

Today we come to the Suffolk County Legislature Veterans and Seniors Committee to help us grow and become a more effective veterans support organization. I'm fully aware of the current economic situation that the County, State and our nation faces as we move into 2011. I'm equally aware that any discretionary funds allocated to our local State and Federal representatives are going to be under greater scrutiny.

Additionally, non-profit organizations like the SPVA face greater challenges in securing financial donations to carry out our important work. And with that being said, we do not come here to the County Legislature to ask for general financial donations to our Veterans Assistance account; instead we're seeking -- we're asking for assistance to build a stronger, more efficient and effective organization with funding for equipment, operational expenses, executive training and even dedicated office space. It is our intention to visit each and every Legislator to request assistance through allocation of discretionary funds or other resources.

The SPVA seeks assistance with the following organizational requirements: Equipment. The SPVA seeks assistance to purchase laptops for our executive board, initial cost of Blackberry devices, not the recurring charges. Podium, accounting software, printers, printer ink, projector screens, County and US Flags and a video conference system to communicate with deployed service members, van for transportation in support all of our operations, if it could be even a County -- I know there's no such thing as surplus probably in this economy right now, but if there's a vehicle that could be maybe allocated to our organization, it's served its purpose, that's something we would seek.

Operational expenses: Printing and mailing our annual newsletter. And I can note that Legislator Stern has already donated or dedicated discretionary funds to pay for our newsletter once in previous years.

Website maintenance, advertising for events, establishing and implementing a college intern program, membership recruitment, public relations and P.O. box.

I'd also like to see the executive board of the SPVA receive non-profit management training. And they have a course at Long Island University. That's another thing we'd seek funding for to send our board there so that could better serve our organization and veterans. And, finally, like I mentioned, office space that we could use for a base of operations for the Suffolk Police Veterans Association.

So in summary we thank all of you again for taking the time to hear us this morning. And we look forward to meeting with each of you to further discuss our request. I'd also like to note that we're going to -- we intend on visiting your state and federal colleagues with the same request in the near future.

And at this time if anybody has any questions, I'll take them. And if anyone has -- wants to learn more about our organization, they could always visit our website, which is www.Suffolkpolicevets.org.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Legislator Romaine.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Quick question. You went through a list of the things that would assist your organization in terms of growth and reaching out to other veterans and law enforcement. Have you placed that on paper with estimates of the expense of each?

MR. BOMBACE:

We have -- no, I don't have those estimates with me. We have that.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Okay.

MR. BOMBACE:

We've done that research.

LEG. ROMAINE:

I think it would be -- it would behoove you to forward that to every member of this Committee; I would dare say every member of the Legislature. Unfortunately you're coming to us now on the advent of March. We've already done our 2011 budget back in October and voted on it in November. So this maybe something that we can consider for the 2012 budget. Or we can look if monies do free up at amending the budgets, which we're only allowed to do four times a year. The first time is already at hand so there'll be three additional times. But that's what I would suggest; that you get that to us as soon as possible.

MR. BOMBACE:

Yes, Sir, I've talked to the Committee Chair. And he said that he's going to forward an e-mail with the information to the rest of the Legislators.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator D'Amaro.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Right, I just want to pick up on that. That was my thought exactly. If you give us some kind of outline with the costs, that would be helpful. But what's your current budget right now? Annual?

MR. BOMBACE:

Every year it's different, I can tell you as far as our operating cost. I mean, we've -- in years we've actually taken in \$75,000 through our fundraising events and other years less. Lately fundraising has been a little bit more difficult with the economy the way it is.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Yeah, it's getting tight everywhere you go. This is an association so you have members, I would assume.

MR. BOMBACE:

We do. And I didn't mention that in my speech here, but we have over 320 dues-paying members right now.

LEG. D'AMARO:

And they pay dues; annual dues?

MR. BOMBACE:

We do. And we let that money -- all the dues from the membership go to a General Fund. And through our fundraising initiatives that money goes directly to this veterans assistance fund. We want to keep those two separate.

LEG. D'AMARO:

And I think the most important thing if you get involved with requesting in detail, funding, I think it's

important to list the programs, you know, the wish list, if you will, and what it cost. But I think you also have to detail the need, you know, the demand, the need. I think that will go a long way in helping your cause as well. And, you know, I'm sure all of us will take a good hard look at that especially when we do the budget.

MR. BOMBACE:

Thanks and I appreciate that. And we have done that in the past. As I said, we've received discretionary funds from Legislator Stern so I'm a little familiar with the process and it's got to be very detailed.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Okay. Thank you.

MR. BOMBACE:

Any other questions?

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Legislator Vilorio-Fisher.

D.P.O. VILORIO-FISHER:

Hi, it's nice to meet you.

MR. BOMBACE:

Nice to meet you, too.

D.P.O. VILORIO-FISHER:

I just -- I had some of the same questions, which was the details, the amount and the scheduling. But I have a request for you. When you speak to those State Legislators, can you mention the State Veterans Home in Stony Brook? Because I know -- some good friends of mine who are retired police officers who are veterans and have had -- and have been at the home and have been treated very well there. And, you know, I have one good friend, Joe Cassidy, who -- but he wasn't a Suffolk County Police Officer. He had been a New York City Police Officer. But that's part of the dignity and the continuum of care that we need for our vets.

MR. BOMBACE:

I agree. And we work closely with Director Ronayne. And I'm fully aware of the value of the Stony Brook Nursing Home so I'll absolutely pass that along to the State officials.

D.P.O. VILORIO-FISHER:

Thank you.

MR. BOMBACE:

Thank you. I thank you all.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

And thank you for being with us. Maybe before you wrap up, maybe you could just introduce your team who's here with you today.

MR. BOMBACE:

I'd like to do that. I'll do that right now. We have right here is our Financial Secretary, Charles Ross. Next to him is Delilah Bustamante our Recording Secretary. And then we have Larry Godoy, my 2nd Vice President and Phil Stefanelli, our 1st Sergeant at Arms. All of them are active law enforcement officers, Suffolk County Police Officers.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Very good. Thank you for, of course, your services and for being with us today. And I'm sure I

speak for all my colleagues both on the Committee and on the full Legislature that we say congratulations to you and your team for all the great work that you're doing over just the past few years. Fortunately you feel the need continue to grow. All the great work that you and your team do and anything that we could do to be of assistance, you know, you got us.

MR. BOMBACE:

Excellent. Thank you, Sir.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

All right. Very good.

MR. BOMBACE:

Thanks to the Committee, too. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

We'll go to the agenda then. We have two resolutions before us.

INTRODUCTORY RESOLUTIONS

First is **1058 - Requesting legislative approval of contract award for a sole bidder to operate a central kitchen to provide meals for nutrition programs for the elderly (Co. Exec. Levy)** I'll make a motion to approve.

LEG. ROMAINE:

Second.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Second by Legislator Romaine. This is a program that Holly spoke to us about. Holly's good. Any questions? Legislator Viloría-Fisher.

OFF THE RECORD

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Maybe you can state that for the record real quick. Legislator Viloría-Fisher.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

In our side-bar conversation is that, if I understood Holly correctly, we don't set the parameters. We get State monies that we match and so we have to run these programs according to the parameters set by the federal government?

DIRECTOR RHODES-TEAGUE:

Right. (Nodding)

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

You're nodding yes, okay. For the record, she's nod nodding yes. Okay. So we just wanted to make sure that was clear. You know, we'd like to modify it, but we don't have the ability.

CHAIRMAN STERN:

Okay. Anybody else? All in favor? Any opposed? Any abstention? Okay. **IR 1058 is approved. (VOTE: 4-0-0-0).**

We have procedural motion.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

PM-01 - Designating Veterans Organizations to receive funding for Memorial Day Observances for 2011 (Stern) This is an annual procedural motion. This is annual authorization to various veterans organizations to purchase flags for Memorial Day services. This year is shared among 17 organizations throughout Suffolk County. I'll make a motion to approve.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:
Second.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Second by Legislator Viloría-Fisher. Anybody on the motion? All in favor? Any opposed? Any abstention? Procedural motion One is approved. **(VOTE: 4-0-0-0)** Okay. Anybody else?

LEG. ROMAINE:
Motion to adjourn.

CHAIRMAN STERN:
Motion by Legislator Romaine, second by Legislator D'Amaro. We are adjourned. Thank you everyone.

THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 12:27 PM

{ } DENOTES SPELLED PHONETICALLY